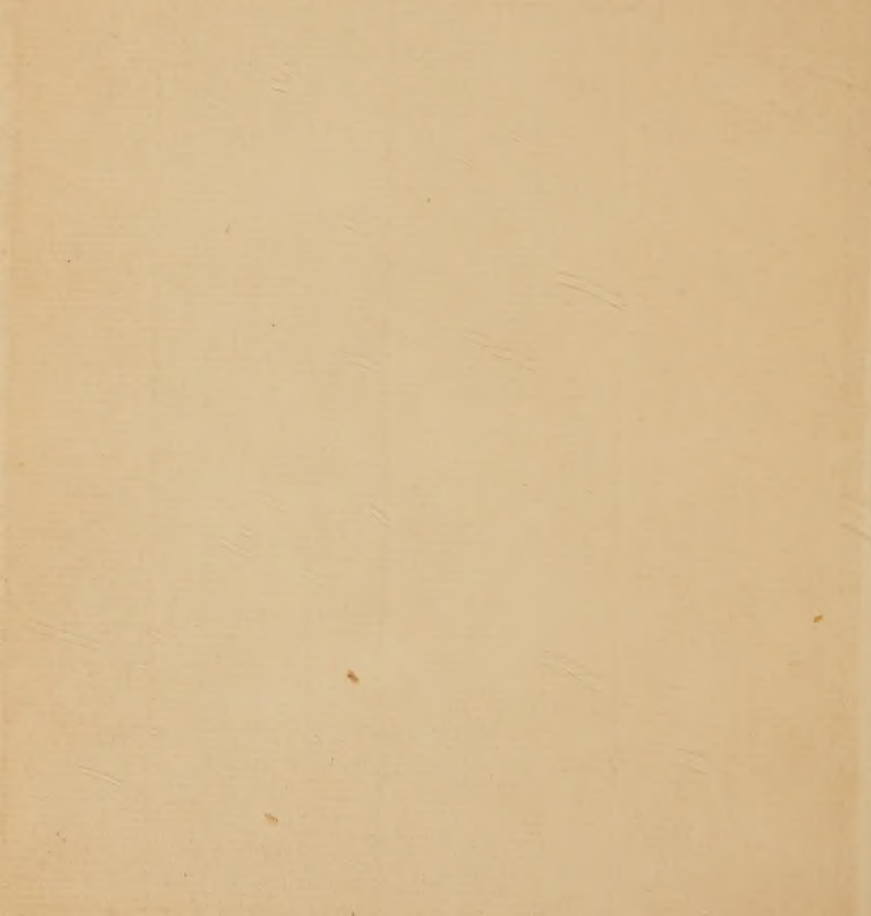


THE HOUND OF HEAVEN

BY FRANCIS THOMPSON





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THE HOUND OF HEAVEN

*"Wrought in a sad sincerity ;
Himself from God he could not free."*

EMERSON



THE HOUND
OF HEAVEN


BY

FRANCIS THOMPSON

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Foreword

 LONE among American poets Sidney Lanier might conceivably have written a poem of the divine insight and solemn vision found fused in the mystic splendours of *The Hound of Heaven*. In common with the writer of *Hymns of the Marshes* the author of *An Anthem of Earth* shared both vision terrestrial and celestial; their essential oneness is not merely casual coincidence. If, when Francis Thompson came to die, the Church was his final consolation—it had been all his life in the deepest and dearest sense his only refuge—Lanier in this respect was not

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*of his company, but passed into Silence with
the cosmic outlook expressed in Sunrise:*

*And ever my heart through the night shall with knowl-
edge abide thee,
And ever by day shall my spirit, as one that hath tried
thee,
Labor, at leisure, in art,—till yonder beside thee
My soul shall float, friend Sun,
The day being done.*

*“The Hound of Heaven has the harmonies
of a symphony, and there are delicacies among
its splendours, and among instants of falsely
fanciful sentiment, such august moments as
this:*

*I dimly guess what Time in mists confounds;
Yet ever and anon a trumpet sounds*

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*From the hid battlements of Eternity,
Those shaken mists a space unsettle, then
Round the half-glimpsèd turrets slowly wash again.*

"It is full of fine and significant symbolism, it is an elaborate pageant of his own life, with all its miseries, heights, relapses, and flight after some eternity." Thus far Mr. Arthur Symons, who, however, withholds his entire critical approval from a poem which Mr. Wilfrid Meynell considers "the profoundest spiritual hymn of its century." As Mr. Symons puts the case: "as he writes it, [the poem] turns intellectual, and the voice is like that of one declaiming his confession."

On the other hand Coventry Patmore said when The Hound of Heaven first appeared in the Poems of 1893, "it had so great and

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passionate and such a metre-creating motive, that we are carried over all obstructions of the rhythmical current, and are compelled to pronounce it one of the very few 'great' odes of which the language can boast." Perhaps the statement made by Burne-Jones at the same period,—"*Since Gabriel's Blessed Damozel no mystical words have so touched me,*"—will best of all, because of its brief veracity, carry conviction to those of us who do not already possess it. The great Pre-Raphaelite painter who had Rossetti for soul's brother was of all men least liable to go astray in his estimate of what makes for righteousness either in art or poetry.

I have noted the elemental affinity existing between Sidney Lanier and the author of The

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Hound of Heaven. *It was merely affirming by indirection how high I had come to rate both poets, who shared, as it seemed to me, in such remarkable degree this transfusion of mysticism and of nature worship inseperable from the greatest poetry,—the poetry which issuing out of one human soul carries its God-inspired message to the souls of all men born —*

Till end be ended, and till ceasing cease.

T. B. M.

*Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or
whither shall I flee from thy presence?*

*If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there:
if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art
there.*

*If I take the wings of the morning, and
dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;*

*Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy
right hand shall hold me.*

*If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover
me; even the night shall be light about me.*

*Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but
the night shineth as the day: the darkness and
the light are both alike to thee.*

PSALMS (CXXXIX: 7-12.)

THE HOUND OF HEAVEN

The Hound of Heaven is molten white
with the passion of the imaginative conscience,
the anguish of the soul that flies before the dim
vision of a pursuing God.

"This gift of dreadful vision is not found
in Crashaw or in Patmore, in Donne or in
Herbert, and therefore it seems to me that
Thompson is essentially more akin to Blake,
Coleridge and Rossetti than to the ecclesiastical
mystics. He is a Twentieth Century mystic
with a Sixteenth Century manner. His
Latinisms, his neologisms, and his conceits are
derivative: his gorgeous imagery is his own."

JAMES DOUGLAS

The HOUND of HEAVEN

I FLED Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
Up vistaed hopes I sped;
And shot, precipitated
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.

But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat—and a Voice beat
More instant than the Feet—
“All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.”

I pleaded, outlaw-wise,
By many a hearted casement, curtained red,
Trellised with intertwining charities;
(For, though I knew His love Who followèd,
Yet was I sore adread
Lest, having Him, I must have naught beside)
But, if one little casement parted wide,
The gust of His approach would clash it to.
Fear wist not to evade, as Love wist to pursue.
Across the margent of the world I fled,
And troubled the gold gateways of the stars,
Smiting for shelter on their changèd bars;
Fretted to dulcet jars
And silvern chatter the pale ports o' the moon.
I said to dawn: Be sudden — to eve: Be soon;
With thy young skiey blossoms heap me over
From this tremendous Lover!
Float thy vague veil about me, lest He see!
I tempted all His servitors, but to find
My own betrayal in their constancy,

In faith to Him their fickleness to me,
Their traitorous trueness, and their loyal deceit.
To all swift things for swiftness did I sue;
Clung to the whistling mane of every wind.
But whether they swept, smoothly fleet,
The long savannahs of the blue;
Or whether, Thunder-driven,
They clanged his chariot 'thwart a heaven,
Plashy with flying lightnings round the spurn o' their feet : —
Fear wist not to evade as Love wist to pursue.
Still with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
Came on the following Feet,
And a Voice above their beat —
“Naught shelters thee, who wilt not shelter Me.”

I sought no more that, after which I strayed,
In face of man or maid ;
But still within the little children's eyes

Seems something, something that replies,
They at least are for me, surely for me!
I turned me to them very wistfully;
But just as their young eyes grew sudden fair
 With dawning answers there,
Their angel plucked them from me by the hair.
“Come then, ye other children, Nature’s — share
With me” (said I) “your delicate fellowship;
 Let me greet you lip to lip,
 Let me twine with you caresses,
 Wantoning
With our Lady-Mother’s vagrant tresses,
 Banqueting
With her in her wind-walled palace,
Underneath her azured daïs,
Quaffing, as your taintless way is,
 From a chalice
Lucent-weeping out of the dayspring.”
 So it was done:
I in their delicate fellowship was one —

Drew the bolt of Nature's secrecies.
 I knew all the swift importings
 On the wilful face of skies;
 I knew how the clouds arise
 Spumèd of the wild sea-snortings;
 All that's born or dies
 Rose and drooped with — made them shapers
Of mine own moods, or wailful or divine —
 With them joyed and was bereaven.
 I was heavy with the even,
 When she lit her glimmering tapers
 Round the day's dead sanctities.
 I laughed in the morning's eyes.
I triumphed and I saddened with all weather,
 Heaven and I wept together,
And its sweet tears were salt with mortal mine;
Against the red throb of its sunset-heart
 I laid my own to beat,
 And share commingling heat;
But not by that, by that, was eased my human smart.

In vain my tears were wet on Heaven's grey cheek.
For ah! we know not what each other says,

These things and I; in sound *I* speak —
Their sound is but their stir, they speak by silences.
Nature, poor stepdame, cannot slake my drouth;

Let her, if she would owe me,
Drop yon blue bosom-veil of sky, and show me

The breasts o' her tenderness:
Never did any milk of hers once bless

My thirsting mouth.
Nigh and nigh draws the chase,
With unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
And past those noisèd Feet
A Voice comes yet more fleet —

“Lo! naught contents thee, who content'st not Me.”

The General

Naked I wait Thy love's uplifted stroke!
My harness piece by piece Thou hast hewn from me,
And smitten me to my knee;

I am defenceless utterly.

I slept, methinks, and woke,
And, slowly gazing, find me stripped in sleep.
In the rash lustihead of my young powers,

I shook the pillaring hours
And pulled my life upon me; grimed with smears,
I stand amid the dust o' the mounded years —
My mangled youth lies dead beneath the heap.
My days have crackled and gone up in smoke,
Have puffed and burst as sun-starts on a stream.

Yea, faileth now even dream
The dreamer, and the lute the lutanist;
Even the linked fantasies, in whose blossomy twist
I swung the earth a trinket at my wrist,
Are yielding; cords of all too weak account
For earth with heavy griefs so overplussed.

Ah! is Thy love indeed
A weed, albeit an amaranthine weed,
Suffering no flowers except its own to mount?

Ah! must —

Designer infinite!—

Ah! must Thou char the wood ere Thou canst limn with it?

My freshness spent its wavering shower i' the dust;

And now my heart is as a broken fount,

Wherein tear-drippings stagnate, spilt down ever

From the dank thoughts that shiver

Upon the sighful branches of my mind.

Such is; what is to be?

The pulp so bitter, how shall taste the rind?

I dimly guess what Time in mists confounds;

Yet ever and anon a trumpet sounds

From the hid battlements of Eternity,

Those shaken mists a space unsettle, then

Round the half-glimpsèd turrets slowly wash again;

But not ere him who summoneth

I first have seen, enwound

With glooming robes purpureal, cypress-crowned;

His name I know, and what his trumpet saith.

Whether man's heart or life it be which yields

Thee harvest, must Thy harvest fields

Be dinged with rotten death?
Now of that long pursuit
Comes on at hand the bruit;
That Voice is round me like a bursting sea:
“And is thy earth so marred,
Shattered in shard on shard?
Lo, all things fly thee, for thou fliest Me!

“Strange, piteous, futile thing!
Wherefore should any set thee love apart?
Seeing none but I makes much of naught” (He said),
“And human love needs human meriting:
How hast thou merited —
Of all man’s clotted clay the dingiest clot?
Alack, thou knowest not
How little worthy of any love thou art!
Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee,
Save Me, save only Me?
All which I took from thee I did but take,
Not for thy harms,

But just that thou might'st seek it in My arms.
All which thy child's mistake
Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home :
Rise, clasp My hand, and come."

Halts by me that footfall :
Is my gloom, after all,
Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly ?
" Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,
I am He Whom thou seekest !
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me."

FINIS

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